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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA PROPOSAL FOR FY10 BIOTECHNOLOGY OUTREACH STRATEGY  
AND DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

EEB/TPP/MTAA/ABT for Marcella Szymanski and Jack Bobo

REF: STATE 122732

¶1. Post appreciates the opportunity to request support for biotechnology outreach programs for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has put forward regulations which require prior approval and mandatory labeling of GM food imports, which hinder U.S food exports to Sri Lanka. The country's domestic agriculture sector is largely inefficient, and biotechnology could be an important tool to increase farmer productivity. Post requests funds to sponsor a conference on biotechnology to pave the way to facilitate biotechnology in Sri Lanka.

¶2. Biotechnology is discussed at many forums and its importance to domestic agriculture is acknowledged by local scientists. However, there is no significant progress towards application of the technology in local farming with biotechnology being confined to research activities. There is a lack of expertise and capacity locally for transfer of the technology from research to field applications.

Outreach Proposal for Sri Lanka  
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¶3. Post requests funding to organize a biotechnology conference in association with a private sector biotechnology research company. Post aims to engage local biotechnology regulators and scientists to discuss the practical applications of biotechnology. The conference will also seek to address the subject of 'Genetic Modification of Plants' to educate the research community in Sri Lanka on the underlying technologies pertaining to plant biotechnology and on their many beneficial applications for the alleviation of a variety of contemporary problems. The focus will also stress the need for transparent, science-based regulations that do not hinder trade.

¶4. Through the conference, Post also plans to emphasize to agriculture scientists, university professors, and officials of the Department of Agriculture the immense potential the technology offers to increase food security, alleviate poverty, and protect the environment. The conference will also demonstrate in a laboratory environment, the technical aspects and finer points of genetic modification of plants to participants.

Cost and Target Audience  
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¶5. The Cost of the proposed program will be approximately \$12,000. These costs will include renting the hall for 5 days, speaker fees, chemical and demonstration materials, stationery, utility costs, and incidentals.

¶6. Target Audiences include: Government officials responsible for GM food regulation; Private sector agricultural associations and industry leaders; Agriculture scientists involved in biotechnology research and officials responsible for development of domestic agriculture; Agriculture University officials; and the National

Science Foundation.

## Issues and Objectives

¶7. Specific agbiotech issues to be addressed include: regulations relating to prior approval and mandatory labeling of GM food (this regulation is being gradually implemented and is affecting U.S. GM food exports); and biotech in domestic agriculture. (NOTE: Biotech is identified as an important tool to develop local agriculture in Sri Lanka. However, there are no commercial biotech crops in production. We plan to spur discussion on how the technology can move from trials and tests to commercial production. We believe that if biotechnology were introduced locally, regulators would not be able to prevent imports of GM products. END NOTE.)

¶8. This project meets USG policy objectives because the conference would help local scientists grasp technical aspects of plant gene modification which would hopefully act as an impetus to apply biotechnology in local agriculture. The expansion and advancement of commercial biotechnology being a USG policy objective, this conference would focus on converting research into applied biotechnology.

¶9. Furthermore, the conference will focus on the potential of biotechnology to develop domestic agriculture and instill serious thinking among policymakers to adopt biotechnology in local farming.

This also meets the USG policy objective to help the country achieve important food security needs. The arbitrary use of insecticide is a major issue that biotechnology could effectively resolve.

¶10. Post responsible officer: Ken Kero-Mentz, Economic Officer.

Email: KeroKA@state.gov, Tel: 94-11-249-8500.

## Comment

¶11. Sri Lanka is in an important position with respect to biotechnology. The country has in place regulations to label, regulate and control the import of GM foods and utilization of biotechnology in domestic agriculture. USDA has expressed concern about the contents of some of the regulations in various meetings and forums with local counterparts, noting that the regulations are not consistent with a scientific approach to the technology and lacks transparency. As a result, the regulations are affecting US food exports to the country. Local agricultural scientists have identified biotechnology as a tool to improve the domestic agriculture sector by increasing productivity and farmer incomes, reducing insecticide usage, increasing yields and contributing to overall food security objectives of the country. This conference, coming at this point as post-war Sri Lanka opens up vast areas to agriculture, is a vital part in our attempts to change the conversation about biotech issues in the country. End comment.

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